National Institute of Justice

Research Solicitation

Classification
Prediction
Methodology Developmen

The National Institute of Justice is a research branch of the U.S. Department of Justice. The Institute's mission is to develop knowledge about crime, its causes and control. Priority is given to policy-relevant research that can yield approaches and information State and local agencies can use in preventing and reducing crime. Established in 1979 by the Justice System Improvement Act, NIJ builds upon the foundation laid by the former National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, the first major Federal research program on crime and justice.

Carrying out the mandate assigned by Congress, the National Institute of Justice:

- Sponsors research and development to improve and strengthen the criminal justice system and related civil justice aspects, with a balanced program of basic and applied research.
- Evaluates the effectiveness of federally funded justice improvement programs and identifies programs that promise to be successful if continued or repeated.
- Tests and demonstrates new and improved approaches to strengthen the justice system, and recommends actions that can be taken by Federal, State, and local governments and private organizations and individuals to achieve this goal.
- Disseminates information from research, demonstrations, evaluations, and special programs to Federal, State, and local governments; and serves as an international clearinghouse of justice information.
- Trains criminal justice practitioners in research and evaluation findings, and assists the research community through fellowships and special seminars.

Authority for administering the Institute and awarding grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements is vested in the NIJ Director. An Advisory Board, appointed by the President, assists the Director by recommending policies and priorities and advising on peer review procedures.

Reports of NIJ-sponsored studies are reviewed by Institute officials and staff. The views of outside experts knowledgeable in the report's subject area are also obtained. Publication indicates that the report meets the Institute's standards of technical quality, but it signifies no endorsement of conclusions or recommendations.

James K. Stewart
Director

August 23, 1984

Dear Colleague:

In 1982 police made over 12 million arrests of which more than 2.5 million were for UCR Part I Crimes. That year 231,000 offenders began serving prison terms and 188,000 were released. Each one of these transactions involved a set of specific decisions by criminal justice officials on how to deal with a particular case and a particular offender.

What factors are being considered that dictate the outcomes of these many individual decisions? Certainly, the legal factors may be presumed to dominate: the nature of the offense, the evidence of culpability, the penalties prescribed by the penal code. But explicitly or implicitly, these decisions are to some degree influenced by assessments of the offender himself. Criminal justice officials must decide -- and often decide very quickly -- how bad an actor they have on their hands. This is, of course, a "system" of classification that all too often must be anything but systematic.

This should in no way be interpreted as an indictment of criminal justice decision making. Certainly great progress has been made over the last quarter century in the never ending struggle for fairness and equity under the law. But within the structure of laws and policies, we still allow some latitude for discretion. Indeed, the public demands that criminal justice officials will exercise good professional judgment, focusing greater attention on criminals who offer the greater threat to society. And that necessarily implies making "predictions" about how an offender is likely to behave in the future.

Risk prediction is, as we all know, a very risky business. When decision makers have to rely on their own experience, they tend to take into account only a few attributes that they regard, perhaps sub-consciously, as salient criteria. Unfortunately,

We believe that systematic research on offender classification systems and the prediction of criminal behaviors shows great promise of providing practical help on these important criminal justice problems. We recognize the extraordinary difficulties facing researchers working in this field. But we feel confident that these difficulties will be seen as a challenge that stimulates the ingenuity and creativity of the nation's scientific community.

Sincerely,

James K. Stewart,
Director

Within recent years issues of offender classification and the prediction of future criminal behavior have achieved a new prominence in criminal justice policy debates.

- A generation ago bail reforms were widely implemented to ensure greater equity in pre-trial release decisions. Subsequent experience has seen a certain amount of disillusionment: in their most sweeping form, perhaps these changes went too far in ignoring considerations of public safety. Many jurisdictions are looking for ways to incorporate into the pre-trial release decision some valid and equitable assessment of individual dangerousness along with measures of the likelihood of failure to appear for trial.

- Continued high levels of crime (and especially violent crime) coupled with loss of faith in rehabilitation as the basis for correctional philosophy has led to a wide variety of sentencing reforms. Partly because of the sheer volume of crime and partly because of changes in sentencing practises, prison and jail populations have in many places reached crisis levels. Policy makers are now searching for safe ways of reducing the number of persons under confinement -- granting early release or devising non-incarcerative sanctions for those offenders least likely to persist in criminal activity.

- The concept of the "career criminal" has led to police and prosecutor programs that target resources on offenders identified as responsible for a particularly high volume of serious crime. The logic, of course, is that the incapacitation of very high rate offenders will prevent a large number of crimes that would otherwise be committed. Indeed, in an idealized form a theory of "selective incapacitation" suggests the possibility of a simultaneous reduction in crime and in prison population levels. In practise, of course, such a policy must depend on an ability to make sufficiently reliable predictions about the future development of individual criminal careers.

Prediction schemes and the underlying classification systems on which they are based are, of course, not new to criminal justice. Corrections researchers in particular have worked for years to develop useable instruments for actuarial

criminal justice officials and at relatively low cost. This can impose rather severe constraints on the kinds of individual information that will in practise be available. But it also raises technical questions about the consistency and internal reliability of a classification process that must typically be administered as a routine operational procedure.

There exists a very substantial literature on the many research issues of concern here. Still particularly noteworthy are the discussions of Hood and Sparks in Key Issues in Criminology (1) and of Gibbons in his article "Offender Typologies -- Two Decades Later."(2) Megargee and Bohn's treatise, "Classifying Criminal Offenders,(3) while primarily devoted to the exposition of an MMPI-based system, also contains sections on the current state of the art and on potential directions for further research. Monahan's monograph, "The Clinical Prediction of Violent Behavior" (4) examines in depth the problem of predictions of violence in individuals. Finally, a useful comparative evaluation of several widely known statistical prediction models is provided in "Screening for Risk"(5) by S.D. and D.M. Gottfredson.

Every day criminal justice officials make thousands of dispositional decisions whose outcome is to some degree influenced by predictive factors. The priority objective of this program is to support the accumulation of a body of research that can inform those decisions by improving on the accuracy of the predictions that go into them.

In addition to the classification/prediction problem, the National Institute also continues to have an interest in sponsoring methodological developments generally aimed at improving the precision and accuracy of measures in crime and criminal justice studies, promoting economy and efficiency in study designs, and enhancing the significance and cogency of study conclusions.

II. REVIEW PROCESS AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Interested researchers should submit proposals in accordance with the instructions contained in Section III of this announcement.

Proposals will be competitively reviewed by a panel of appropriately experienced researchers from outside the agency. This panel will be chaired by the NIJ program manager. The result of the panel's deliberations will be the selection and recommendation of those proposals that would in its view constitute the most worthwhile program that could be supported with funds available. Authority to make grant awards is, of course, reserved to the Director of the National Institute of Justice.

Funding for this program has been tentatively set at a level of about $750,000 which would typically support 5 to 7 grants. It is recognized that this program budget ordinarily would not be adequate for support of large scale experimental projects or those requiring the collection of large amounts of original data. Limited funds could be provided, however, for design and feasibility studies for such projects. Program support for a design study would not imply an NIJ commitment of support for the follow-on project.

III. HOW TO APPLY

Eight copies of fully executed proposals should be sent to:

Classification, Prediction, Methodology Development Program
National Institute of Justice
633 Indiana Ave., N.W., Room 900
Washington, D.C. 20531

A fully executed proposal consists of the following:

1. A completed and signed Federal Assistance application on Standard Form 424 and OJARS 4000/1.

2. A budget narrative.

3. A program narrative.

Applicants should note the requirement that all machine-readable data sets generated in conjunction with NIJ supported research must be provided to NIJ at the end of the project period along with code books and documentation.

As attachments to the program narrative, applicants are required to furnish: (1) a project abstract of not more than 200 words; (2) a short (1 page) schedule of the planned sequence of project activities; and (3) a brief statement of the grantee organization's relevant qualifications plus professional resumes of key project personnel.

It is expected that once each year there will be a two day meeting of senior researchers on all projects being sponsored under this program. Dates and locations of these meetings remain to be decided. All applicants should include $1,000 for each year or fraction during which the research is to be carried out. The explanation in the budget narrative should state that this is a "standard NIJ estimate to cover expenses of travel to the annual program conference, as directed in the program solicitation."

IV. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION SCHEDULE

Eight copies of the fully executed proposal must be received by the close of business on January 30, 1985 to be eligible for the first cycle and on June 12, 1985 to be eligible for the second cycle.

V. FURTHER INFORMATION

In order to obtain copies of the required application forms or to get further information about the program or the application process, researchers should write to Richard S. Laymon, Program Manager, Classification, Prediction, Methodology Development Program, at the above address in Section III. Dr. Laymon can be reached by phone at (202) 724-7635

Applicants who have a research idea but are uncertain of its appropriateness for funding under this program are strongly encouraged to call Dr. Laymon and discuss the project with him before undertaking the considerable amount of effort required

Downs; The Regents of the University of California/Davis.

Classification and Prediction

84-IJ-CX-0017 - "A Base Expectancy Model for Forensic Release Decisions;" Thomas McEwen; Research Management Associates.

84-IJ-CX-0016 - "A Cross Validation and Test of the Generality of the MMPI Bas Offender Classification System;" E.J. Megargee; Florida State University.

83-IJ-CX-0047 - "Research and Development of a Criminal Career Classificati System;" D. Randall Smith; Institute for Criminological Research, Rutgers.

83-IJ-CX-0011 - "Improving Correctional Classification Through a Study of t Relationship of Inmate Characteristics and Institutional Adjustment;" Kevin Wrigh SUNY at Binghamton.

Other NIJ programs that may be of interest to applicants include:

Crime Control Theory and Policy	Closing Dates: Jan. 9 and May 15, 1985
Drugs, Alcohol and Crime	Closing Dates: Jan. 16 and May 22, 1985
Violent Criminal Behavior	Closing Dates: Jan. 23 and June 5, 1985

York (1970).

2. Gibbons, D.C., "Offender Typologies -- Two Decades Later," British Journal of Criminology 15(2), 140-156 (1975).

3. Megargee, E.I. and M.J. Bohn, Jr., Classifying Criminal Offenders, Sage Publications, Inc., Beverly Hill, 1979.

4. Monahan, J., The Clinical Prediction of Violent Behavior, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Rockville, MD (Copies of this monograph can be obtained from the Government Printing Office at a cost of $5.00 each. Prepaid orders citing GPO Stock No. 017-024-01049-9 should be sent to:

Superintendent of Documents
Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402.

5. Gottfredson, S.D. and D.M. Gottfredson, Screening for Risk, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, August 14, 1979. (A copy of this report can be obtained by contacting the National Institute of Corrections/Information Center, 1790 30th Street, Room 130, Boulder, CO 80301; (303) 444-1101)

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